

How Uncle Sam Collects His Crop Statistics; "Leaks" Will Occur In Spite of Keenest Vigilance

At 4 o'clock on a recent afternoon the government crop report for the month was made public at the department of agriculture. Precisely at the striking of the hour the door of the office of the chief statistician opened and Assistant Secretary Willet N. Hays appeared, bearing in his hand a dozen sheets of paper covered with figures. These papers were seized eagerly by a dozen waiting messenger boys, who rushed off with them to the telegraph offices.

Then Mr. Hays drew a long breath. "Ten hours ago I had no idea what those totals would be," he mused. "I'll be mightily surprised, though, if there isn't a story in some paper tomorrow morning about those same totals being known to certain favored stockbrokers for several days. 'Twas ever thus."

Mr. Hays had not miscalculated. On the following morning all the leading dailies in the country published the report and commented freely upon it. Some of them did little more than hint darkly at abuses which seemed to prevail in the department. Some of them printed in full the charges of the Southern Cotton Growers' association, that the reports of the cotton crop were "doctored" systematically and furnished in advance to favored operators.

But this was by no means the beginning of the trouble. For months the criticism and accusation had been going on. Charges had been preferred against some of the department employees, and some of them had been asked to resign. The most recent crop reports were less satisfactory than ever. It was charged boldly by those most interested that "leaks" were occurring constantly. Secret service agents reported that incriminating evidence could be found against more than one trusted clerk in the statistician's office. Some of them had become rich in a most unexplainable and mysterious manner. The president demanded speedy reform. Secretary Wilson began an overhauling of the department. From the first he exhibited a willingness to co-operate with all outside efforts looking toward a full and impartial investigation and showed in every way his determination to put an end to the department abuses and to restore the government crop report to its former position in the public confidence.

About a year ago a sharp attack was made on Chief Statistician John Hyde by a combination of cotton growers. The matter created a good deal of discussion and ill feeling, and there was talk of a congressional investigation, but nothing was done at the time. The committee of agriculture of the house gave a preliminary hearing to some of the charges of jobbery, but it was decided not to attempt a formal inquiry. Since then Secretary Wilson has been standing staunchly by his crop force. He is thoroughly familiar with every detail of the complex system by which news of local crop conditions is picked up from all parts of the country and combined in a comprehensive statement covering the general situation. This system is surrounded by so many safeguards to prevent leakage and so many checks and balances that the reports have been tested through so many years of temptation that the secretary has found it very hard to realize that the methods em-

ployed and the personnel of the bureau are not beyond criticism. Subsequent developments have induced him to modify his early opinion as to the impossibility of the bureau, and he is willing to admit that he has been the victim of overconfidence. The pressure from the growers' interests has been so great that Chief Statistician Hyde has resigned, and Assistant Secretary Wil-



SECRETARY WILSON

let N. Hays has been put in charge of the statistical bureau with unlimited authority.

The government system of crop reporting is really a wonderful scheme, and the reporting force is a peculiar organization. It is composed of about 250,000 agents scattered all over the land and is probably the least expensive organization, in view of its size, in existence. The total appropriation for the support of the bureau of statistics is only \$190,000 a year. Out of this sum must be paid the salaries of the chief statistician, a large corps of assistant statisticians, and many agricultural experts, all located at Washington; then come the field men, the state agents, the county correspondents, and the township reporters, aggregating all told, 250,000 men. It is an enormous agency, and it is kept going at small expense from a tiny \$190,000 in an annex of the agricultural department building.

Of course the entire force is not called on in the compilation of the ordinary monthly crop reports. Twice a year the chief calls on all of his force for information. The reports are then going at small expense from a tiny \$190,000 in an annex of the agricultural department building.

corn is included with the other crops. In midsummer a mammoth report is sent out embodying the opinions of the entire force of 250,000 forecasters, and at harvest time another similar report is issued.

It is a fact that the foundation of the crop reports furnished by Uncle Sam is built of the agricultural opinions of a great number of unpaid men. These

year for specific facts which enter into the general forecast of crops just prior to harvesting time.

The paid force, those who receive some portion of the \$190,000 set aside by the government for the purpose of maintaining the bureau, is small, but capable. It embraces the state agents and the field men. The state statistical agents, one for every state, according to the plan, are paid from \$300 to \$500 a year for about a week's work in each month. They are kept posted by the county correspondents, but they are not dependent entirely on their reports. They are allowed the greatest possible latitude in the exercise of their

chief of the division. In the apportionment of the work great care is taken to keep the section reports separated widely, so that no clerk is permitted to deal with figures for a single crop covering a wide area. Extra precaution is taken to detect collusion, and every night before work is over the records are all collected and locked in a great safe. The reports of the state agents and the field men are put in this safe also and kept there under unbroken seals until a stated time.

The issuing of a completed report is quite a ceremonial affair. On the eventful morning of the day on which it is to appear the secretary of agriculture

evitable that these guesses should occasionally prove to be correct. Whenever it happens thus, there is an immediate charge of crookedness against the bureau. It has been so since its organization, and it has been threatened repeatedly with investigation. In spite of the effort that has been made to prevent it, the department officials do not deny that crookedness has been practiced. They insist, however, that it has not been the rule.

When the department of agriculture was created, in 1842, and put in charge of an official termed the commissioner of agriculture there was faint promise that it would ever arrive at its present

set or has taken the trouble to sound popular opinion on the matter known to be created, in one of the most important among the nine great divisions of the general government. It has been a fortunate thing for the department that its heads thus far have been men of good practical sense, men who were willing to devote all of their time and attention to the work of promoting the agricultural interests of the nation.

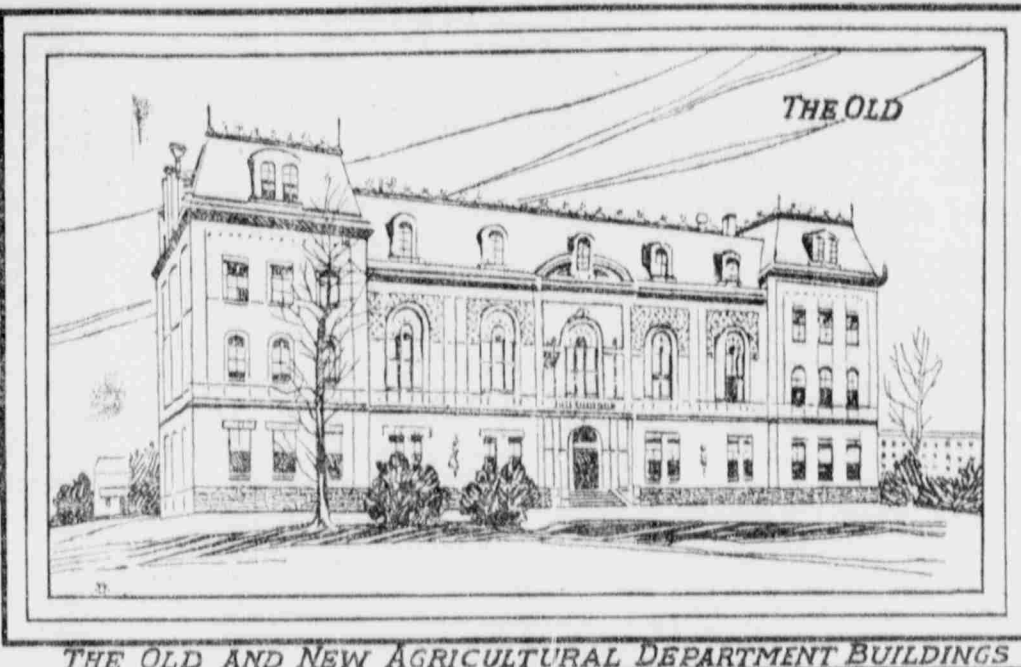
There have been but four secretaries since the foundation of the department as it is now constituted—Norman J. Coleman of Missouri, Jeremiah M. Ruak of Wisconsin, J. Sterling Morton of Nebraska and James Wilson of Iowa, the present incumbent. All of them have proved to be admirable selections. Mr. Coleman was secretary less than a month, but he had been commissioner and had obtained an excellent record in that capacity. No other department has shown a quicker growth or has entrenched itself more securely in the affections of the people. It has become an indispensable part of the governmental machinery, and vast interests are bound up in it. The eagerness with which its monthly crop bulletins are awaited is an evidence of its standing among the farming community, and the very fact that questionable methods of obtaining them in advance have been resorted to shows their commercial value. Ever since their first issue attempt have been made to manipulate them dishonestly, and it is quite likely that occasional leaks will continue in spite of the increased vigilance.

Until congress assemblies Mr. Hays will have control over the entire work of the bureau. This appointment was in accordance with the president's recommendation. He believes that Mr. Hays is peculiarly qualified to take charge of the government's immense system for collecting crop reports and has unlimited confidence in his ability to put a stop to the leakage of reports. The salary of the chief statistician has been only \$3,500, and it has been difficult to get a capable man to accept the office. On that account congress will be asked at the next session to increase the salary to at least \$5,000.

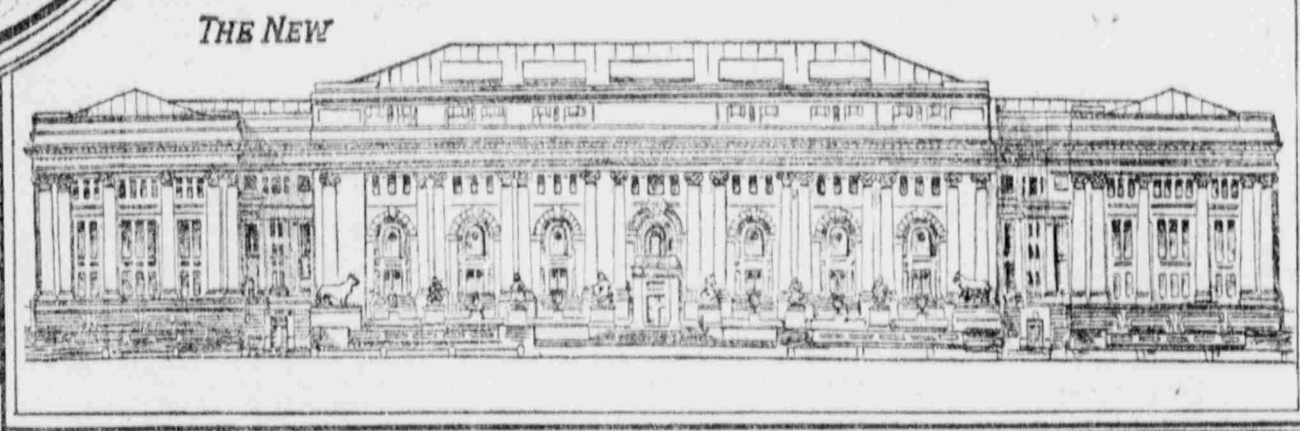
Mr. Hays has an excellent reputation among agriculturists and scientists. He has not been in the agricultural department long enough to establish a record, having been appointed assistant secretary last fall after a spirited contest which lasted several months. He is an unassuming and modest man, who prides himself on the fact that he is first of all a farmer. For fifteen years before coming to Washington he had been a professor in the agricultural department of the University of Minnesota. His specialty has been plant breeding, and his successes in that direction have made him famous all over the world.

Mr. Hays is the experimenter who from a single plant developed Minnesota wheat No. 165, which has been adopted by the great wheat growing section of the northwest and has increased the aggregate yield by millions of bushels. He has also been very successful in breeding new varieties of corn suitable for culture in the far northwest. He is a man of tireless industry, precise methods of work and a thoroughly scientific mind. He combines with the studious habits of the scholar the directness and good judgment of the practical man of affairs and is also reputed to possess executive ability of unusual force.

ALBERT ROSSITER.



THE OLD AND NEW AGRICULTURAL DEPARTMENT BUILDINGS



THE NEW

are at least 40,000 township correspondents, all of them farmers of sufficient intelligence to fill out blank forms provided by the government. These forms ask for information concerning the area of land under cultivation in different crops, amount of rainfall, etc. The men and women who send in these reports are satisfied to receive as a reward for their labor a few packages of seed in the spring and some of the publications of the department for winter reading. The next body of official news gatherers consists of the county correspondents. There are 2,600 of these, each of whom has three assistants, making a total force of county correspondents of 7,800. The department has a list of over 100,000 other farmers, who are called upon twice a

own judgment and are men of standing and character in their various communities. The field men receive \$7 a day and expenses. Literally construed, their duties consist in moving about in their own districts during the growing season and gathering information from any source accessible to them. They interview not only farmers and planters, but get information from implement dealers, merchants, bankers, stock growers, etc. They are given the fullest possible opportunity to form their judgment from the comments of men on both sides of the crop question.

Every precaution is taken to prevent leaks. The sheets sent in by the county and township correspondents are distributed to the office force by the

or his assistant goes over to the office of the chief statistician to witness the opening of the envelopes. The door of the office is locked, and no one is permitted to enter until the compilation is completed. The clerks keep to their tasks until the final results are reached. After repeated verification a trust-ed employee is called into the room and set at work running off the reports on a mimeograph machine. Meanwhile the reporters and messengers are waiting impatiently in the corridor for the door to open, and when it does the mad scampering begins.

Of course it is inevitable that there should be much preliminary guesswork in interested quarters as to the tenor of the expected report. It is equally in-

consequence, having for its head a member of the president's cabinet. In 1858, during the administration of Grover Cleveland, the commissioner of agriculture, Norman J. Coleman of Missouri, was given a seat in the cabinet, and agriculture was raised to the dignity of an actual department of the government. The wisdom of the action was doubted by many persons at the time, and there were many who saw in it a mere political expedient, "a sop to the farmer," and who were of the opinion that little actual good would come from transforming the former commissioner into a cabinet officer, enlarging his powers and increasing the bureau under his supervision. Nowadays, however, every person who has given any attention to the sub-

Tithing or "God's Tenth"

By REV. A. J. GORDON, D. D.

In touching the question of giving, we touch the most vital point pertaining to the conservation and spiritual power of the church. In saying this, we speak from experience, as we certainly speak according to Scripture. "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, . . . and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing that shall not be room enough to receive it." Here, plainly, the giving of tithes is made the condition of an abundant outpouring of the Spirit. The spiritualizing method of interpreting Scripture, which robs us of so much vital truth by frittering away its meaning in metaphor and simile, has often robbed us of the real significance of this text. Prayer, testimony, effort, self-denial—how often do we have these duties mentioned as summing up and fulfilling the requirements of tithing. But "tithing" means money or other property of equivalent value; and the effusion of God's Spirit is here made contingent upon bringing in the tithes, and paying up those due to God. A tenth of his income was required of the Jew to be set apart, and was devoted to God's treasury. And this was the first test he set before the last tithes, the first-fruits, not the dregs and leavings. And while the amount due was specified in the New Testament, the same principle is carried over into the Christian era. "Upon the first day of the week," let every one of you lay by him in store as God hath prospered him" (1 Cor. xvi. 2). Here is consecrated giving—laying in store—a certain sum set apart, and made sacred to God's use, and with it thereafter one should no more be loath of using for himself than he would think of taking the same sum from his neighbor's pocket. And here is proportionate giving—"as God hath prospered him." 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